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Message Text

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17
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

OMB-01 TRSE-00 SAB-01 AID-05 ACDA-07 EB-07 /091 W
---------- 046988
R 092010Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8266
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 3793

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PA
SUBJ: PANAMANIANS BRIEF GOP ON CANAL ISSUE

SUMMARY: A SPECIAL TEAM FROM PANAMA VISITED PARAGUAY SEPT 6-7 TO BRIEF TOP GOP OFFICIALS REGARDING PANAMA'S POSITION IN CANAL NEGOTIATIONS. THEY DID NOT MAKE ANY SPECIFIC REQUEST FOR GOP SUPPORT. THE PARAGUAYANS REMAIN PRIVATELY UNSYMPATHETIC WITH PANAMA'S OBJECTIVES, BUT WILL PROBABLY GO ALONG WITH ANY REGIONAL CONCENSUS ON THE CANAL ISSUE. END SUMMARY'

1. SPECIAL PANAMANIAN TEAM LED BY FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER JUAN TACK VISITED PARAGUAY SEPT 6-7 TO BRIEF GOP ON PANAMA'S OBJECTIVES IN CANAL NEGOTIATIONS. TACK TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE MISSION WAS VISITING VARIOUS LATIN-AMERICAN COUNTRIES OF OFFER PANAMA'S VIEW FIRST HAND TO HOST GOVERNMENTS. PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR TO PARAGUAY SAID THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF THE MISSION WAS TO INFORMTHE GENERAL STAFFS OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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LATIN-AMERICAN AMRED FORCES OF THE ASPECTS OF THE NEGOTIA-

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TIONS RELATING TO THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL. TEAM GAVE TWO-HOUR BRIEFING WITH FILM AND SLIDES TO FOREIGN MINISTER NOGUES AND DEFENSE MINISTER SAMANIEGO TOGETHER WITH CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF, GENERAL FRETES DAVALOS, AND OTHER KEY MILITARY LEADERS.

2. DEFENSE MINISTER SAMANIEGO AND GENERAL FRETES DAVALOS STATED PRIVATELY TO COMMANDER US MILGP THAT THE MAIN POINTS MADE BY THE PANAMANIANS WERE THE ABROGATION OF THE 1903 TREATY AND THE ASSERTION OF PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION OVER THE CANAL ZONE. THEY SAID US COULD RETAIN BASE AREAS, BUT THESE SHOULD BE REDUCED TO MINIMUM ACCORDING TO PANAMANIAN PRESENTATION, THIS WOULD NOT AFFECT DEFENSE OF CANAL BECAUSE US COULD AIRLIFT SUFFICIENT FORCES FROM CONUS IN A FEW HOURS TO HANDLE ANY CONTINGENCY. PARAGUAYAN OFFICIALS SAID PANAMANIANS SEEMED PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN GREATER ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM CANAL. THEY SAID PANAMANIANS AT ALL TIMES SPOKE RESPECTFULLY OF THE US AND DID NOT MAKE ANY SPECIFIC REQUEST FOR PARAGUAYAN SUPPORT.

3. A NUMBER OF THOSE PRESENT, INCLUDING GENERAL MARTINEZ IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, HAVE TOLD US THAT PARAGUAY DID NOT FIND THE BREIFINGS PERSUASIVE AND REMAINED PRIVATELY UNSYMPATHETIC WITH PANAMA'S OBJECTIVES. THEY CONTINUE TO SUSPECT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT OF LEFTIST TENDENCIES AND OF POSSIBLY HAVING LINKS WITH CUBA. THEY ALSO BELIEVE ONCE PANAMA CONTROLS THE CANAL THE TOLLS WILL BE RAISED.

4. COMMENT: DESPITE THESE PRIVATELY HELD RESERVATIONS, THE GOPIN THE PAST HAS PUBLICLY SIDED WITH THE OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT PANAMA ON THE CANAL ISSUE AND WILL PROBABLY GO ALONG WITH ANY FUTURE CONCENSUS ON THIS ISSUE.
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